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9 February 1965

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN

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*USSR-Vietnam: The difficulties confronting the Soviet leaders in their relations both with the Asian Communist governments and the US were reflected in yesterday's brief and generally cautious Soviet government statement.

Although it condemned the US reprisals and warned against any "illusion" that such "aggression" can be carried out with impunity, the statement did not advance the Soviet commitment beyond earlier pledges of "necessary assistance" to Hanoi. Moscow declared that it "will be forced" to join its allies in "further measures to safeguard the security and to strengthen the defensive capability" of North Vietnam. Although this statement reaffirms the USSR's readiness to provide a substantial increase in military assistance, it does not appear to signal any significant increase in the level of aid envisaged prior to Kosygin's departure for Hanoi.

Another sign of Moscow's desire to prevent any expansion of hostilities was the statement's implicit rejection of the US contention that Hanoi was directly responsible for the Pleiku attack. The statement described the attack as the work of "South Vietnamese patriots" and portrayed North Vietnam as the innocent victim of an unprovoked US attack.

The Soviets also tried to influence US policy by injecting a cautious warning that, although the USSR favors further improvement in bilateral relations, "aggressive manifestations" might cancel out steps already taken to improve them.

(continued)

Although this first authoritative Soviet reaction suggests that the Soviets will continue to avoid military guarantees or specific commitments to defend North Vietnam, it is considerably stronger than Khrushchev's reaction to the Tonkin Gulf incidents last August. This attempt to demonstrate support for North Vietnam reflects the new Soviet leaders' intention to regain influence in Hanoi and to compete more effectively with the Chinese Communists in the Indochina conflict.

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Approved For Release 2012/08/03 : AEDP900975A008100370001-1

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